

A Review of “On Education” by Bertrand Russell

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Abstract: Russell is an impressive educator in the long history. His work “On Education” is regarded as an epoch-making guide to students, parents and teachers. This book review firstly introduces the author, his word and his writing background, secondly gives a summary of “On Education” and look through some inspiring details, thirdly says something about comments and reflections on the book and lastly concludes the whole book and the review itself. In the third part, his educational aims, games and imagination, sex education and misunderstandings in his educational ideas are highlighted. The review aims at taking my feelings down and broaden my ideas about Russell and education.

Keywords: Russell; On Education; Education.

1. Introduction

Bertrand Arthur William Russell is one of the hottest and the most prestigious philosopher, mathematical logician and educator in the 20th Britain. By deeply researching political democracy and learning from his own children education experience, he came up with a series of educational values, some of which are highlighted, like educational ideals, character education and intellectual education, which are depicted in his work, “On Education”.

2. Historical Background

Firstly, it is about his own life experience and living conditions, which provided the material foundations for his achievements. But he, much of a maverick, loathed tradition and old parenting ways, out of living a depressing life at his young age.

Russell, who surprisingly insisted that “what I do mean is that the educational system we must aim at producing in the future is one which gives to every boy and girl an opportunity for the best that exists,” born with a sliver scoop in his mouth, received a good education and took learning seriously. Nevertheless, his grandmother was a Protestant, sticking to religious rules connected with taboos and commandments. What’s more, lacking companions and receiving traditional instructions, he became more and more critic and then turned to think more about education.

secondly, he just grew up in the 20th century. The New Educational Movement marked this era, and the conflict between individual standard theory and social standard theory swept the globe. Russell pursued their unity---children, with free education and full-development, are the center and are qualified enough to serve the society. “The modern world needs a different type, with more imaginative sympathy, more intellectual suppleness, less belief in bull-dog courage and more belief in technical knowledge.” “Pupils should be regarded as ends, not as means.” He challenged feasibility of the educational theories of Locke and Rousseau, who once gave great inspirations to the New Educational Movement. Although both of them advocated liberalism and democracy, they were just caught into aristocratic education. Reflecting on the form education, he chased after equality and democratic education, and progress without sacrificing civilization.

Thirdly, apart from the influence of new educational ideas, liberalism and nationalism in politics came into vogue, and then feminism followed and sprang. Both females and the lower class were thirstier for equality and freedom, in either economics or education. In his book, equality between men and women was reflected in all aspects, like in the sex education section.

Fourthly, the current social situation affected the demand for talents. Owing to industrial revolutions and scientific revolution, the United Kingdom had accumulated lots of wealth. But economic crisis broke out, and laissez-faire turned the whole country downward quickly. Most educators started to think out better educational modes to cultivate new talents to follow the new capitalist development trend. Russell is one of them, emphasizing four virtues, vitality, courage, sensitiveness and intelligence, all of which are developed through school educating and own social experiencing.

On the other hand, Russell devoted himself to researching on various educational issues after the first world war. In his book *Principles of Social Reconstruction* (1916), he reclaimed some public schools of industrialized countries educated students on misleading false beliefs. Out of these false beliefs and lack of belief inclusiveness, numerous wars happened. Therefore, in Russell’s view, reforming the education system is beneficial to stopping and then eliminating wars.

Lastly, natural science and Marxism spread widely, lots of people began to treat the internal law of living and development seriously, including Russell, who firmly believed human nature is determined by the combined effects of genetics and environmental factors. So, he thought education can shape children and human is neither kind nor evil by nature. Instead, children can develop morals and a conscience through character education. He even took his educational values into practice in Beacon Hill School, set up by him and his second wife, Dora Black.

3. A Summary of the Book

In “On Education”, the author also analyzes relevant issues from the perspectives of parents, teachers, students and society. This book can be divided into three parts: The first part is the ideal of education, which mainly expounds the basic principles of modern education theory and the purpose of education. The second part is character education, focusing

on character development from infancy to adolescence. The third part is intellectual education, which includes training and developing from kindergarten to university. When talking about the education of what to teach and how to teach, Russell, from different perspectives, carefully lists the cultivation methods and curriculum arrangement of character education and intellectual education, and also mentions the objectives of university education and the work of university teachers.

In the first part, he says something about characteristics, content and purpose of education. At the beginning, the essence of education is stated clearly by listing several controversies, that is, the ornamental role and the useful role, material goods and mental delights. Russell believes the real education is useful, but intrinsically valuable, which means both the humanistic elements and scientific knowledge are included into education. In this social background when people were addicted to Utilitarianism and hedonism, education should cultivate students full of some usually desirable characters. They are vitality, courage, sensitiveness and intelligence. What's more, education is aimed at making national greatness by taking advantage of its utility. Russell does not agree with Japanese dogmatic education or Chinese skeptical education. He is strongly against that education for the church, but for pupils with full love.

In the second part, in their infancy, especially at the age of one, their health and character are emphasized. During this part, the author pays much attention to habit developing, in other words, regularity and routine. He stresses parenting means parents should demonstrate simple behaviors that infants are willing to do and then they will repeat these again and again. It is of great rationality to get a balance between neglecting and coddling to avoid their being inadequate or self-important.

At the age of from two to six, character education plays an important part. This part later presents readers with some methods to realize character education, like overcoming fear, handling selfishness and property as well as maximizing the role of game and fantasy, honest, punishment, friends, love and compassion, and sex education. It worths highlighted that construction is a significant part in character education. It hints that children should enhance the potentials for developing interest and realizing self-construction with enough family education. And then they are encouraged to serve the society, which is the other aspect of construction. It totally reflects Russell's view, the unity of individual standard theory and social standard theory.

Nursing school is set up for education between early character training and later intelligence cultivating. It features class equality in education, that is, democracy in education and fairness among partnership.

In the third part, at the age of six, intellectual education goes up onto platform. Curiosity, patience, industry, exactness are all general principles. About curiosity, Russell, to dealing with some abnormal curiosity, students should be encouraged to freely express their ideas, even if these ideas are appalling. And then students are provided continuously with rich knowledge which becomes gradually more technical and more scientific, until all things make them tired or push them to discard their abnormal curiosity. Before the age of fourteen, the school curriculum should be set up step by step, from simple to complex. To be mentioned, Russell speaks highly of Montessori's teaching method. Russell holds that geography teaching and history teaching should be linked with travelling, but history teaching should start with storytelling, especially

celebrity anecdotes. Dance and song education are also important, recitation plays a lot in literature learning. After the age of fourteen, there are three kinds, classical subjects, mathematics and science, modern humanities. They have relative teaching methods and teaching spirits. Besides, day schools and boarding schools are talked in the last part, like which is better for students.

4. Comments and Reflection on the Book

4.1. The Aims of Education

In Russell's opinion, the aims of education are complex, which is closely related to individuals and the whole society. Firstly, utilitarianism and humanism are complementary. When education is only for the pursuit of external interests, to meet economic needs to fill personal desires, and ignores the value of education itself, such as virtue, knowledge, etc., education has become a means to meet social needs and achieve personal material enjoyment, which we call the utilitarian value orientation of education. The educational purpose of humanism is the opposite. Humanistic educators insist that the main purpose of education is to promote human development, which mainly refers to the development of human rationality, morality and spirituality. They oppose the preset external educational purpose to dominate education, advocate the development of students' own development as the goal, emphasize the development of human personality and potential, and take the harmonious development of all aspects of human as the goal. They hope that human nature, human dignity and human potential can be maximized in the process of education realization and development ". in his book "On Education", he analyzes three arguments and concludes that both practical knowledge and spiritual knowledge are indispensable. So, it reflects his objective and neutral attitude, advocating their combination.

Secondly, individual education and citizen education are both important, but individual education first, citizen education second. According to Russell's conclusion, individual education is of greatly positive significance for the civilization integration and world harmony. Only citizen education cannot cultivate "great people" in morality, emotion and will. On the other hand, it is for political purposes and times development, blocking the further development of individual personality, because it stresses cooperation and mutual assistance, which suppresses human potential. Nowadays, a need for innovative talents have forced education out of this narrow and conservative education. Therefore, only after the comprehensive individual education, citizen education can play the biggest role in inheritance of human civilization. Otherwise, only citizen education, not individual one, is an overall repressive crisis.

Thirdly, Russell advocates the negative education, that is, more freedom is left to the children. The negative education is developed by a famous educator, Rousseau, who came up with an idea that children with uncontaminated nature are allowed to grow up as they please and what educator do is to protect children from social adverse impacts. For one thing, children will detest anything for being robbed of their freedom. And if their detest fails to vent, children are prone to hate parents, the church and the whole society in the future, and even to prevent their children from expressing their feelings freely. That is always regarded as the cause of crimes and other bad behaviors. For another, children are unwilling

to express themselves under the control of parents. Most of them lack creativity and thirst for knowledge. Curiosity, which is talked particularly in the later part, is a good method of encouraging children to ask why and to have a try. But the authority forces them without desire and interest to study or impose complicated work on them, which only leads to the opposite to what everyone wished. What's more, children, having enough freedom, can play games and exert their imagination to explore the world with some practical skills and knowledge. All in all, Russell totally agrees with the negative education. But considering the influence and development brought by industrial evolutions, he proposes to connect the negative education with the positive one. That is because the positive plays an importantly guiding role in rationality development and technical training.

Fourthly, in his book, Russell claims that it worths discussing whether it's meaningful to add patriotism into the educational content. In the introduction part of "On Education", the author expresses his strong disgust at wars and colonial expansion. There are some countries educating children to maximize economic benefits and to enlarge own country through plundering in wars. For example, in the second world war, Japan launched the war and aggressed China. And the Japanese government propagated it a just war that save Chinese from hell, which is spread through Japanese schools. But wars destroy wealth and kill people. Therefore, as far as he is concerned, everyone should stay calm and rational on patriotism education and keep away from invading other nations, which is the most vital thing having passed down generation by generation.

Lastly, Russell thinks the best education should feature freedom and rationality. There are four specific qualities related to them, that is, vitality, courage, sensitiveness and intelligence. Vitality means a healthy body and an optimistic and energetic character, which are essential to deal with daily problems. By the way, optimism helps provide people with a new horizon to face difficulties and then find out an efficient solution. In addition, vitality prevents children from jealousy, which is the main cause of irritability and lack of concentration. Courage is the key to overcoming fear, then getting more self-control and developing habits, Russell stresses again and again in his works. As for the source of courage, they are self-respect and non-personal outlook on life. The former one means people care their inner feelings more and are not affected too much by the outside world. The latter one means people can love and realize everyone is a drop in the ocean. Death is the end and everyone will die. All the misfortunes children encounter are small cakes. Sensitiveness is one kind of quality that can make up the shortcomings of courage. Sometimes, children just take a series of actions out of courage when having no ideas about what is the process or the priority. Instead, what does Russell suggest is making sound judgements and taking measurements after learning and reserving as much knowledge as possible. As we all know, thoughtful insights are affected by cognitive aspects and emotional aspects, that is, wisdom and sensitiveness, which are both significant. If a person is too sensitive, he is much easier to get angry and stimulated, rather reckless. Intelligence includes the ability to accept knowledge and actual mental development level. If a person gets less dogmatic ideas, the more likely he is to accept new things and learn more knowledge. But it is hard to achieve. It is more accessible to learn new things and get more abilities. Curiosity is one of sources of intelligence. First of

all, need to have a good habit of observation, which means a careful understanding and observation of everything. Next, have patience and perseverance. Finally, study and get more knowledge as support. If a person has a strong curiosity and has received a higher level of intellectual education, he must have a much higher level of development than others. But when curiosity conflicts with other factors, it will also be restricted. Due to the constraints of inertia and desire, we may refuse to accept the new truth. When we find that the theory that we have believed in for many years is incorrect, we often get a sense of failure with our indifference and insensitiveness. The society need the efforts of people with a skeptical attitude.

To sum up, what kind of people is education for? Russell gives a clear answer, that is, people with vitality, courage, sensitiveness and intelligence. Vitality enables us to live a relaxed and happy life and constantly gives us the motivation to overcome difficulties; Courage is a necessity in our daily life. When dealing with difficulties, we need to burst out courage heading to a more positive direction; sensitiveness is a necessary complement to courage, so that people with wisdom are more likely to succeed when coping with troubles. Intelligence, the main education content, means the ability to accept knowledge and practical intelligence, which complement each other and jointly promote the development of human civilization among the whole society.

4.2. Games and Imagination

In the book, Russell holds the opinion that both young animals and kids enjoy games and role-play. Actually, children are not aimed at enjoying something related to sex, but instead, they are keen to get the will to power. For example, Chinese children like to play the game of police catching thieves. That means, some of them play the part of police, representing justice, while the rest as thieves, representing evil. When pretending someone in the game, most of the children like playing the police role, who are strong and respectable enough to be admired. Therefore, the young love dreaming of being a hero or someone like that, or learn something in the games, which prove their ability to hold power and stand out from peers.

On the other hand, playing games can improve their sense of security. At a very young age, kids are fond of playing games with parents. Parents act as a kind of monsters, while kids pretend to be scared with happiness. However, for one thing, it helps children a lot to learn some knowledge about the monster so as to satisfy their curiosity. For another, kids can overcome some fear for security by playing characters with families or friends.

In conclusion, first of all, games function in talent getting, while imagination makes up for failing and missing of the real life. Children less come across misfortune, but they need getting prepared to handle difficulties. So, role play and imagination are drills where children have the chance to get abilities and knowledge in advance.

Secondly, providing time and space for their pretense and dreaming just complies with the law of education. Factually, education is for cultivation of instinct, instead of suppression. When he was a child, his will to gain power was stifled in the bud, and he would become spiritless and lazy, neither good nor evil, that is a person called "a Dio Spiacenti ed a'nemici sui".

Thirdly, it is not necessarily advocated that games and imagination are prohibited and that morals can be developed in the playtime. That is because they are too young to

understand the moral values behind games. At an age when moral values can't be understood and taken into practice with full response and when there is no need to stick to moral values and restrict behaviors, it is useless to implant moral values in people forcibly. It only causes their disgust. When the same moral concepts need learning and take effect one day in the future, children are instead indifferent to them.

Fourthly, children can learn how to cooperate through games. And games highlight the important role of communication and real social environment in studying the new. Friends are very important. Compared with tutors, parents, teachers and other adults, friends can let elder kids to get grand and acquire will to power, while the elder can teach the younger without generation and information gap. In the meanwhile, communication between peers does goods to moral education, that is necessary virtue when the strong and the weak get along. Become brave and avoid cruelty. What needs to be solved is to guide students to escape from vicious and cruel competitions as well as overemphasize games or physical education and pay less attention to intellectual education.

4.3. Sex Education

What impresses me most is Russell's attitude towards sex education as well as his respect on women. He sticks to treat it as a normal and to educate students appropriately. As a matter of fact, both western countries and eastern countries regard sex education as a taboo because of religious beliefs or government policies. For example, in western countries, including the United Kingdom, suppressing desire is heavily stressed. They have passed down some religious ideas generation by generation from the Bible, like the original sin. In their culture, because their ancestors Adam and Eve ate the forbidden apple secretly, as offspring of them, all the western people are born evil. Only can continence help a guilty man atone for his sin. However, with the rapid spread of the evolution theory, people have had a more overall understanding of human biological characteristics, and have become frank about sex. Another reason for say nothing about sex education is the low status of women, which causes women to become tools for men to vent unhappiness and so on. According to the Bible, "And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man." So, women are accessories of men. Gradually, with the development of education, economics and science, women have the right to work and to be educated, who have pursued equality for a long time. With the higher and higher statue of women, increasingly open social atmosphere as well, sex education has become up to the stage.

Sex education is always neglected in Chinese class. Just take me for example. During my school life, there is not any lessons and activities about sex education in my school or in my family. Many girls know nothing about dealing with the flowering period when they first come across, while most boys are addicted into male masturbation and mean enough to belittle women. Mass students lack knowledge about sex and then have improper and unhealthy love relationships. All of these are partly related to lack of early sex education. That is happening in many schools, both in China or other countries. Sex education is always invisible, which lets it more difficult to offer sex education.

Russell screws up his courage and turns to talk about sex education, especially at the age before adolescence, which enlightens me a lot. According to the author of the book, the

first is to face sex education squarely, that is, parents treat sexual issues like you would anything else, answer sexual problems frankly, and lastly play your part in educating kids on sex, not bad kids taking that part.

Secondly, masturbation is discussed intensively. Boys and girls aged 2 to 3 years old often masturbate. It is common for people to have such behavior, which usually stops after a little longer. However, nowadays, treating masturbation with horror and stopping it with terrible threats are very common. However, it is wrong to prohibit masturbation. In fact, studies have found masturbation does little harm to health. But if parents strongly stop kids' such behavior, it will be counterproductive. It worths recommending that when the child goes to bed, let him fall asleep immediately, and that put his favorite toys on the bed to distract him. Thirdly, satisfying their curiosity is the key to solving sexual misconducts. Otherwise, there happens some bad things. For example, if parents cannot tell relevant knowledge of fertility clearly, children probably attitude towards it blasphemously and express it as a lewd anecdote. That is what both Russell and I have heard. Even after they grow up, they will regard sexual desire as a funny and indecent thing, and do not respect women who they have sex with. From above, to some extent, gender equality has something with sex education. it is wise for parents to explain the reproduction of animals and plants, which has in common with human reproduction and development.

Fourthly, parents are the center and the key role of early sex education. They should take the responsibility to explain sexual confusions and teach them relative knowledge, such as hygienic knowledge and sex physiology knowledge. What's more, it is of great important to guide young people to understand that having children is a serious matter. Some out-of-date social ideas should be excluded from sex education. For example, having as many children as possible during marriage to supply elder parents in the future, ignore the mother's health and the family's economic situation. Another social idea, is that greater values is placed on sons in order to carry on the family line, which is out of date and totally wrong. Besides, another thing is necessary in teaching sex. Jealousy should not be used as the weapon to protect power. It is a misfortune of the jealous person and a reprehensible act on the envied one. Love cannot become an obligation, but is based on the voluntary union of both. Therefore, domestic violence, infidelity and a marriage of convenience should be criticized.

4.4. Misunderstandings in Educational Views

Firstly, the contradiction in Russell's view of educational purpose is obvious. On the one hand, Russell favors the negative education, providing children enough freedom for enhancing their curiosity for wisdom and their ability of self-control. He once sent his son John to the nursing school of Albert Bridge. After that, John consciously obeyed the discipline. For his own experience, he regarded it as the success of Montessori education method. Later, Russell also applied this education method to his Beacon Hill school, that is, a very simple rule: do free children of using any facilities without restrictions and requirements. He wrote, this is a way of early education to train the will, which can help children develop a harmonious character from an early age, and make children honest, tender, innovative and constructive. On the other hand, paradoxically, he mentions that children must also be aware of the restrictions on freedom from other children or

adults, which Russell regarded as the purpose of cultivating children's sense of social responsibility.

Secondly, Russell's masterpiece "On Education" inspires people from different countries, including me from China. But there are still some misunderstandings owing to the confinement of his times. For example, the author has unique understandings of characteristics of Chinese and Western civilizations, but they seem incomprehensive and inaccurate. But he attributes differences in cultures to Greek vitality and Chinese laziness. Greek once devoted all the energy to developing art and science with great accomplishments. When Greece was invaded, all the public would fight hard until the last second out of their political responsibility and love for the motherland. When a Greek statesman was dismissed and expelled, he would gather some exiles up in a hurry to attack his own city. On the contrary, a Chinese official would only go back to the mountains and forests, sing poems and write poems about the joys of rural life so as to comfort himself from his great aspirations difficult to fulfill. Besides, in his work, he records that, "We have thus in modern Japan and a defect opposite to that of ancient China. Whereas the Chinese literati were too skeptical and lazy, the products of Japanese education are likely to be too dogmatic and energetic." It is concluded from above that Russell thinks Chinese are lazy and skeptical about everything. What does Russell emphasize is that "What it should produce is a belief that knowledge is attainable in a measurement through difficulty." But I think his view about China is one-sided. Personally, on the one hand, if Chinese people were lazy, there would be no prosperity in small-scale peasant economy in ancient China, no development of the imperial examination system. Actually, Chinese people were more "conservative" than lazy. They were so "conservative" that were always self-sufficient by ploughing and weeding, unwilling to do business and overseas trades. They were such "conservative" people that chose to get promoted step by step. The deep love and enthusiasm for serving the nation is the main impetus for the poor young to participate in several domestic examinations and selection. Just few officials retreated to live in the mountain area in the old days, like Tao Yuanming. There were a large number of Yue Fei, Zhu Geliang and Wei Qing subscribing themselves and serving their country all the life. On the other hand, Chinese were doubtful to some extent rather fear mistakes and refuse to have a try. There were lots of wars in the long history of China, which proves Chinese bravery and courage. Instead, Chinese people are skeptical about national machinery and bureaucratic systems, therefore many revolts and domestic wars happening. They, full of courage and dare, made mistakes many times and kept trying on the new road. So, we cannot regard China as a lazy and skeptical nation, which insists impossibility and mistake-disappearing in Russell's eyes.

Thirdly, he exaggerates the role of education. After the first world war, he diverted himself to the education area. After studying causes and influences of wars, he has concluded reforming education would help a lot in the society and stop or eliminate wars. Besides, Japan's autocracy and dictatorship, affected by dogmatism, are mostly caused by its distorted education. In addition, he believes that inequality in education accounts for class antagonism. All in all, education affects a lot, but has not a dominating role. It is important to remember that the economic foundation and the political systems play a decisive role.

Lastly, in the chapter of "Punishment", he says, as long as

someone is a little unfriendly to your little child, you will immediately return him with the same. But both of children have no ideas about what is right or wrong in their very young age. It needs discussing whether what Russell advocates is suitable or appropriate. In the same chapter, Russell mentions Rousseau think it is necessary for teachers to use harsh punishments at some time. But Rousseau heavily objects to being harsh and strict with children, such as using punishments, in his work "Emile". In the chapter of "Love and sympathy", Russell expresses his disbelief in the Oedipus complex, that is, son has a special feeling of closeness to mother and daughter to father. But in my opinion, it is debatable.

5. Conclusion

Russell marked his era with epoch-making significance, especially advocating paying more attention to individual development and democracy in education, which were hard to accept and understand for people at that time. Threatened and intimidated by senior social leaders, like the Pope and some democratic opposition party, he eventually failed in practice but left a valuable spiritual legacy. The first important thing I have learned is love and respect for education. As a future teacher, I should keep my love and passion for my career. As Russell learning from others and achieving a lot, I should move on the road to exploring and learning.

As a matter of fact, in Russell's nearly a century of career, his rich experience in teaching and social activities are unmatched by any western ideologists in the history. Therefore, his educational views also have rich content, which worth studying and researching. In modern education, students are trained for passing tests and finding high-salary jobs, while their personalities, interest and love are ignored. However, only a person full of vitality, courage, sensitiveness and intelligence can keep on. His curiosity, vigor and enterprising spirit promote innovation movements, individual development and social progress. Only a person with full development in advance can build a sound and prosperous society. For such problems, Russell's view of focusing on needs of human development gives inspirations.

In addition, the increasing economic development will inevitably lead to the increasing requirements of the society for individual employees in all aspects. Today's students are generally faced with pressure from all sides, which makes it inevitable for parents, schools and even the society to exert heavy pressure on them, enlarging the hidden danger of students' physical and mental health problems. At this time, we might as well learn from the negative education and liberalism, Russell favors. Russell realizes that coercion in education would cause irreparable harm to people's physical and mental health in the future, so he always advocates that education should have the fullest freedom, although this freedom is limited from some aspects. In the meanwhile, maximizing the role of games and imagination provides a more meaningful way of releasing pressure and a more practical method of learning skills and checking results.

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